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TAGS: [OREP](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [AFIN](#) [RP](#) [HG](#) [LA](#)  
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL Branegan - Visit to the Philippines (Nov 10-14, 2008)

REF: STATE 117498

¶1. Embassy Manila welcomes Mr. James Branegan, professional staff member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Control officers for his visit will be Econ Officer, David Rovinsky, who can be contacted at: office (63 2) 301 2332, cell no. (63 917) 867 3521, home (63 2) 815 3862, e-mail: [RovinskyDJ@state.gov](mailto:RovinskyDJ@state.gov), and Grazyna Coffin office (63 2) 301 2552, cell (63 917) 867 3529, home 833 2995, e-mail: [coffingx@state.gov](mailto:coffingx@state.gov). Mr. Rovinsky will meet Mr. Branegan at the airport and provide him with the per diem for lodging and M&IE.

¶2. Hotel accommodations are confirmed at Makati Shangri-La Manila hotel, Ayala Avenue corner Makati Avenue, Makati City, tel (63 2) 813 8888 fax (63 2) 814 5499. Hotel daily rate is approximately USD 160, including taxes, service fee and breakfast.

¶3. Scheduled agenda, times local (Washington plus 13 hours):

November 10  
22:15 Arrive Manila, flight JL74. Meet and greet by David  
Rovinsky, Economic Officer  
November 11

8:00-9:00 Breakfast with Amb. Curtis S. Chin (ADB)  
9:00-13:00 Meeting with Director General, Dr. Robert Zeigler and staff, International Rice Research Institute, Los Banos  
13:15-15:30 Meeting with the Chancellor, Dr. Cesar B. Quicoy, University of the Philippines, Los Banos

November 12

8:15-9:30 Call on Ambassador Kenney, followed by Country Team Briefing (Embassy)  
9:30-11:00 Round Table Meeting (Embassy officers & Staff) USAID, FAS, Econ  
11:00-13:00 Travel and lunch  
13:00-14:00 Meeting with Christopher Wensley, Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Div, ADB  
14:00-15:00 Travel  
15:00-16:00 Meeting with Isagani R. Serrano, Vice President Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement

November 13

8:30-10:00 Meeting with Usec Segfredo Serrano, Department of Agriculture, Policy and Planning  
10:00-11:00 Travel  
11:00-12:00 Meeting with Ramon Clarete, University of the Philippines, School of Economics, and Abraham Manalo, Biotech Coalition of the Philippines  
12:00-13:00 Lunch and travel  
13:00-14:00 Meeting with Stephen L. Anderson, Country Director, World Food Program  
14:00-15:00 Travel

15:00-16:00 Meeting with Margarita R. Songco, Deputy Director,  
National Economic & Development Authority

November 14

8:00-9:00 Meeting with Arcadio Cruz, Assistant FAO Representative,  
Food & Agriculture Organization

10:00-11:00 Meeting with Leonardo Montemayor, Federation of Free  
Farmers, (former DA Secretary)

11:30 Proceed to the airport for 14:50 flight

14. Terrorism: The terrorist threat to American citizens in the Philippines remains high. The Embassy continues to receive reports of ongoing activities and of planned multiple attacks throughout the Philippines by known terrorist groups. The Embassy urges visitors to observe vigilant personal security precautions, to remain aware of the continued potential for terrorist attacks against Americans, and U.S. or other Western interests in the Philippines. The Philippine government has been engaged on and off in negotiations with Communist and Muslim rebel groups. Nonetheless, rebel activity and armed banditry in certain areas of the Philippines still pose security concerns. The Communist Party of the Philippines and its terrorist military arm, the New People's Army, operate throughout the country and have issued public threats against U.S. citizens and interests in the Philippines. Americans are urged to exercise caution when traveling throughout the country and are specifically warned to avoid hiking or camping in the vicinity of Mt. Pinatubo in Pampanga Province.

In Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, kidnappings, bombings, violence, and insurgent activity make travel hazardous in many areas. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which the U.S. Government has designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization, has kidnapped several Americans and other foreign tourists since April 2000. Some were freed after substantial ransoms were paid, some escaped or were rescued by military action, and some were killed. Other kidnapping gangs operate in the same general area and have abducted a number of foreigners for ransom. Operatives of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which the U.S. Government has also designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization, are also present in the Philippines. JI is an extremist group linked to al-Qaeda and other regional terrorist groups and has cells operating throughout Southeast Asia. Extremist groups in the region have demonstrated a capability to carry out transnational attacks in locations where Westerners congregate. Terrorist groups do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. U.S. citizens and interests may be at increased risk of terrorist actions from foreign or domestic extremist groups in the Philippines. There are periodic reports of plans for possible terrorist acts aimed at U.S. Government facilities or personnel, public and private institutions, and transportation carriers. The Embassy takes all such threats seriously. The RSO reminds all visitors to remain vigilant with regard to personal security issues and always to follow basic and important security countermeasures: do not establish a pattern or routine in movement and travel; vary the times and routes taken to the extent possible; maintain a low profile; and immediately report any unusual activity, to include possible surveillance, to the RSO. In light of recent events, the State Department urges all visitors to maintain a high level of vigilance and to increase their security awareness when traveling throughout the Philippines. All visitors are urged to review the State Department's most recent Public Announcement on the Philippines. Due to the United States' efforts in the on-going War Against Terrorism, the potential for retaliatory acts against Americans worldwide is real.

15. Crime: As in many of the major metropolitan areas in the United States, crime is a serious concern in Metro Manila. As a rule of thumb, visitors are advised to exercise good judgment and remain aware of their surroundings. Reports of confidence games, pick-pocketing and credit card fraud are common. Be wary of unknown individuals who attempt to befriend you, especially just after you have arrived in country. A number of recent robberies and assaults involving the "date rape drug" (known locally as Ativan) have occurred; the drug is generally administered to unwitting male and female visitors via food or drink. It is best not to accept food, drink or rides in private vehicles from strangers, even if they appear legitimate. There have been several kidnappings and violent assaults of foreigners in the Metro Manila area, although Americans

have not been specifically targeted in such crimes. There have also been reports of gunmen robbing foreign passengers in vehicles traveling to and from the international airport.

¶16. Taxis are the recommended form of public transportation. However, the following safeguards are important: do not enter a taxi if it has already accepted another passenger; and, request that the meter be used. If the driver is unwilling to comply with your requests, it is best to wait for another cab. It is also a good idea to make a mental note of the license plate number should there be a problem. When driving in the city, make certain that the doors are locked and the windows rolled up. All other forms of public transportation, such as the light rail system, buses, and "jeepneys" should be avoided for both safety and security reasons.

¶17. Visitors should also be vigilant when using credit cards. One common form of credit card fraud involves the illicit use of an electronic device to retrieve and record information, including the PIN, from the card's magnetic strip. The information is then used to make unauthorized purchases. To limit your vulnerability to this scam, never let your card out of your sight. A continuing problem is the commercial scam or sting that attempts to sell or to seek negotiation of fraudulent U.S. securities. Visitors should be wary when presented with supposed Federal Reserve Notes or U.S. securities for sale or negotiation. Common sense is the rule of thumb.

¶18. Travel: Before traveling to the Philippines, we urge you to visit the State Department's web site at [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) for the latest security and travel information. All visitors should defer travel to isolated beach resorts and avoid personal travel to the islands of Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago. The RSO must approve all official travel to these islands in advance.

¶19. If you have additional security-related questions, you may contact the RSO either through your control officer or directly at (632)528-6300, ext 2290, (632)522-2337 (FAX), or at [RSOmanila@state.gov](mailto:RSOmanila@state.gov).

¶10. We look forward to your visit.

Kenney